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AMERICA'S FIRST BATHTUB.

BY GEORGE A. REID

Seven feet long, four feet wide, built of mahogany, and weighing seventeen hundred and fifty pounds—this was America's first bathtub. It was so heavy that the floor of the room in which it stood had to be reenforced and strengthened. It was designed by its owner, Adam Thompson, of Cincinnati, and made by a local cabinetmaker. It created a violent discussion in the Cincinnati papers as to whether it was dangerous to health, many doctors affirming that "it invited rheumatic fever, phthisic, and inflammation of the lungs."

Adam Thompson, the designer, was a rich grain and cotton dealer, who got his idea abroad, says H. L. Mencken, in his account of the man and his inventions. While he was in London he learned that the Prime Minister had a bathtub in his home—a "glorified dish pan," it was called. Thus Thompson came home with a new idea, and started to put it into practical form. This was in 1842.

Modern plumbing being unknown at that time, he who would have a tank of this kind in his house must put a hand pump into his well. In fact, practically all houses had wells or cisterns of their own. Thomson's next thought was for the tub itself. It must be of wood, of course. He built a cypress tank in the garret. So large was it that it took six negroes to keep it pumped full. But at its best, unheated bath water afforded rather cool comfort, so the tub maker, being ahead of his age in more respects than one, set about supplying heat. He rigged a coil of pipes in the chimney, so that heat from the large grate fires warmed the water.

On December 20, 1842, Thompson had a party of gentlemen to dinner, and boasted so of his bathtub that four of them, including a French officer, tried it for themselves. Next day the story was in the papers, and then the fun began.

That is, it seems like fun to-day, but it was earnest enough then. The doctors attacked the bathtub on the ground of health, and the politicians opposed it as an obnoxious and luxurious toy from England, designed to corrupt American simplicity. In 1843, the Common Council of Philadelphia considered an ordinance to prevent any such bathing between November and March. The ordinance failed by only two votes. In the meanwhile, the legislature of Virginia laid a tax of thirty dollars a year on all bathtubs that might be set up, and special and very heavy water rates were also laid on them. Boston actually passed an ordinance forbidding the use of bathtubs except on medical advice.

But it was soon a dead letter, for in 1850 the President of the United States decided to have a bathtub in the White House. Millard Fillmore, it seems, when Vice President, had visited Cincinnati as the guest of Adam Thompson, had taken a bath in the famous tub, and had liked it so much that, when he succeeded Taylor, he invited bids for a White House bathtub. It was made by Harper and Gellespie of Philadelphia, and was of thin, cast iron. It remained in the White House, by the way, until Cleveland became President, when a more modern contrivance took its place.

Before twenty years had passed over Adam Thompson's bathtub, every hotel in New York was advertising one, and some hotels actually had three! To-day America has almost forgotten her bathtubless days.

From *The Germantown Guide*.

Contributed by Mrs. H. S. Prentiss Nichols.